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THE INTEGRATION PROCESS OF ALBANIA TOWARD NATO

Granit Rexha

After the collapse of communism in Albania in 1991, Albanian leaders of that time have been seeking political relationship as close to the West. After forming a new political alternative in Albania as was the Democratic Party in 1992 assumed leadership of the state. Since then all the political aspirations of the Albanian leaders were Albania to integrate into European institutions such as the European Union and other world organizations such as NATO etc. After several terms of the Council of Europe Albania accepted in 1995 while in the same year, Albania made request to become part of NATO because it was very necessary for this country in terms of national security, because we know that at that time was period when the Balkan states started wars and conflicts between states. At the same time until 2000, Albania was weak even in economic terms as carrying around 1 million Kosovo Albanian refugees who fled their countries and Albania had no chance until 2001 to make further steps on integration NATO, so that after stabilization state, Albania began with the policies and relations often with North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It needed major work by Albanian politicians also because Albania did not meet many conditions to be part of NATO, but after gradual development and policies of Albanian leaders and assistance from EU countries and USA, Albania finally became a member of NATO on 04 April 2009.

Albania – NATO Relations

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 brought major changes in established political balances, and became serious issues of transformation within the North Atlantic Alliance, in terms of relationships with potential partners outside the alliance but with some new conditions. Summit in 1991 in Rome, besides a new strategic concept of NATO, the Alliance turned a step in its policies for a new strategic cooperation on the issue of security and its political issues, between NATO and the countries of the former treaty Warsaw, and became the creation of a new organization called NACC consultation (North Atlantic Cooperation Council) that Albania becomes a member in June 1992. In Brussels in 1994 was created the Partnership for Peace initiative, this initiative was created to include the new democracies and was offered partnership to all countries to consult directly with the Alliance, about their concerns in the security field, giving these countries the chance to be partners in the overall process of strengthening security in Europe. And movement toward political and mil-

itary structures of NATO. Albania was among the first countries to those of the former communist bloc, who had signed the Document of the Partnership for Peace initiative, this document was signed on 23 February 1994, and also that Albania formally requested membership in NATO. Albania supported the Dayton Peace and also the role of alliance in support of peace. Albania it provided to NATO all its aero portal facilities for actions in Bosnia. It should be noted that a very important development of Albania relation with NATO was the commissioning of the Albanian Mission to the Alliance in Brussels, in October 1997, after the Brussels Agreement on the status of the missions and representations from Third Countries in NATO took effect. Washington Summit in April 1999 created the opportunity for membership of the nine aspirant countries (Vilnius Group 9 + 1) where Albania was still part of the beginning. In the history of an alliance is another important point, the Prague Summit in 2002, after the summit initiated the invitation for the biggest enlargement that NATO ever had, seven of Vilnius

Group countries took the invitation to join, giving a sense and input relationships of Alliance with its partners. In 2003, Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, and the U.S. signed the „Charter of Partnership“ or A3.¹ This initiative demonstrates the joint vision for peace and stability in South-East and serves the cooperation that leads the region at the Euro - Atlantic structures, with the goal of integration in them. The Istanbul Summit in 2004 was an increase in the number of members to 24, and confirmed „Open Door Policy“ and had enlargement of the alliance. Albania received no invitation to join, but the Summit recognized and praised Albania's progress in implementing the Annual National conditions and programs within the framework of MAP, and the role of Albania for policies for stability in the region. Alliance summit held in Riga. The Alliance extended the candidate status to Albania and other countries in the process of MAP status of the candidate to receive invitation for membership to join NATO at its upcoming Summit. Bucharest Summit 2-4 April 2008, the Alliance invited Albania and Croatia to join the alliance. After some conversation between Albania and NATO they signed in Brussels on 9 July 2008. In the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit Albania eventually become part of NATO on April 1 2009.²

Achievements and Perspectives

When we talk about Albania's accession to NATO, we say that this membership represents a specific history of special relations. No member country of the Alliance, cannot base policy of NATO in public opinion in general agreement with more than 90% of the population. Geographical location, history, culture, population, indicates to us a unique view of a country with very enviable geographic position from Alba operations in the nineties and from the Italian Pelican to become today a security provider to contribute to worldwide and NATO for peacekeeping. We can say that few nations have experienced profound transformation as Albania arrived in recent years, playing an important role and crucial allies, to end the tragedy of Kosovo, and contribution to peace in the region. Albania has had a special isolation during communism, and after 46 years of rule in 1991 communism falls. At that time the Democratic multi-party parliament was established and strong support of the West, and willing to play roles in international politics. During the nineties Balkans was hit by several serious historical event, Democracy in Albania was strengthened and grew rapidly. This historical process required vision, leadership, and a major commitment by the population. Analyses made by the Albanian community describe a very special feature. In fact, Albania is the only country in the world to its surrounding borders is surrounded by a population divided into the same nationality.³ If we talk in numbers then we say that from 6.5 million only 3.6 Albanian living in Albania. This shows that Albania plays a very pow-

Table of the evolution of Albania-NATO relations

1992	Albania joins the North Atlantic Cooperation Council
1994	Albania joins the Partnership for Peace (PfP)
1996	Albanian forces join NATO in the peace keeping mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina
1999	NATO established a logistics base in Tirana-Albania, for operations in Kosovo
2000	Albania hosts the PfP exercise "Adventure Express" and "Cooperative Dragon"
2001	Albania hosts the initial phase of the PfP exercise "Adventure Express 01"
2002	NATO HQ Tirana was established to assist Albania in implementing reforms to its protective abilities, and to contribute to the command of KFOR
2003	Albania forces deploy in support of NATO in the International Security Assistance in Afghanistan.
2005	Albania joins the Operational Capabilities Concept A combined medical team of three MAP countries join the NATO-led forces in Afghanistan, in August Albania hosts the PfP exercise "Cooperative Engagement 2005" in September
2007	Albania expects a meeting of Euro-Atlantic Policy Advisory Group of the EAPC in May Albania hosts the PfP exercise "Cooperative Longbow 2007" and "Cooperative Lancer 07"
2008	In 2008 in April, Albania invited to talk about membership in the Alliance NATO Allies sign the protocols for Albania membership of the North Atlantic Treaty, on 9 July 2008
2009	1 April 2009, Albania becomes a full member of NATO

¹ Albania Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Albania's Relations with NATO. 13 July 2010 http://www.mfa.gov.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5723:-marredheniet-e-shqiperise-me-nato-n&catid=73:marredheniet-e-shqiperise-me-nato-n&Itemid=65&lang=sq

² Wapedia. Enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization http://wapedia.mobi/en/Membership_Action_Plan

³ Albania and the European Union. Mirela Bogdani, John Loughlin. I.B.Tauris,2007. Page 119-121

erful role in the region and for the stability and Euro-Atlantic Integration of the Western Balkans. Unlike the experiences of other countries in the region, Albanian culture was always open to religious affiliations, which are never ever considered a threat or a dividing factor. It is a strange but actually very truly, the satellite antennas in the cities of Albania, attest to the overwhelming desire of people for information arising from various structures of the world, and it shows the support of the people in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration. The invitation of Albania and Croatia at Bucharest Summit to join the alliance, was a new chapter for the Western Balkans that shows a way in which a stable region is completely integrated into Euro-Atlantic institutions, and able to contribute in International Security. Albania was the first to apply for NATO from the former eastern bloc countries. Since Albania joined the Council of the North Atlantic Cooperation in 1992, integration into Euro-Atlantic structures was the main purpose of Albanian politics. In 1995 Albania developed the first Individual Partnership Program, and in 1996 entered the Planning and Review Process. In the same year Albanian forces joined in the NATO-led SFOR to maintain peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴ Cooperation with NATO increased progressively towards the aspirations of country for membership. At the same time Albania has played a very big and crucial role in supporting the Allies, to end the tragedy of Kosovo and to contribute to stability after the air campaign of NATO. Washington Summit in 1999, Albania reached Membership Action Plan (MAP) and became member of NATO aspirant together with Croatia and FYR Macedonia. Since 1999 Albania was engaged in eight MAP cycles and in 2008 leaders of NATO's summit in Bucharest invited Albania to start talks with the Alliance. Requirements and objectives of the MAP, were focused in five areas: political, economic defense, legal, financial, and information security. These requirements together with the Partnership Goals and Force Goals, which will be conducted in the framework of PfP PARP and requires a deep reform of institutions and the Albanian Armed Forces. Armed Forces of Albania adopted a new

⁴ Italian Media. l'Occidentale. Albania and NATO: Achievements and Perspectives
<http://www.loccidentale.it/articolo/albania+and+nato:+achievements+and+perspectives.0068576>

development plan 2020, which aimed at achieving a modern force, motivated, and highly professional immediately in the next year. Albania is named as taken place to the wider responsibilities in the Western Balkans, and the prospect of their integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Albanians that living in Kosovo and Macedonia can play a very important role in this regard. The new status of NATO to increase evaluation and geo-strategic position of Albania, this new state of the Alliance, which represents the door of the Balkans in the Mediterranean and a crossroads of the Caucasus pipeline that will provide energy supplies in Europe.⁵

Key areas of cooperation

Albania also joined the allied forces operating in Afghanistan. Albania contributes about 135 military personnel in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), as part of the Turkish contingent, and Italian. Also four medical personnel, as part of a combined medical team of three MAP countries, they were joined ISAF in 2005 and serve under Czech contingent. Albania also contributes with all the NATO countries in the peacekeeping operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁶ An Albanian contingent joined in 1996 and continued their contribution to the European Union's Operation Althea. Althea replaced NATO-led SFOR operation in 2007, Albania is continuing contributions to NATO's maritime counter-terrorist operation in the Mediterranean. Albania under PfP has prepared and has identified a number of troops available for training and exercises with NATO. This included a group of infantry troops who are on a high alert, a commando unit, including Special Forces elements, medical support, engineer and military police. Albania has also participated in many PfP exercises and actions. Albania is one of the countries that contribute in the fight against terrorism, through participation in the actions of the Partnership against Terrorism. This includes a deep cooperation with NATO in the exchange of information and analysis with NATO, as the growth of the national anti-terro-

⁵ Ryan C. Hendrickson, Jonathan Campbell and Nicholas Mullikin. Albania and NATO's 'Open-Door' Policy: Alliance Enlargement and Military Transformation <http://www.library.eiu.edu/ersvdocs/3801.pdf>

⁶ Albanians-Webster's Quotations,Facts and Phrases.Inc Icon Group International 2008.Philip M. Parker.Page 11-14

rism capabilities and security of national borders.⁷ NATO is supportive of the democratic development of institutions in Albania, which is presented in the Annual National Program. Particularly in support of security sector, NATO HIQ Tirana is a forum for bilateral consultations on the implementation of the security of Albania. Regarded as a key priority for Albania to ensure the preservation of control of the Armed Forces. These efforts are supported in Partnership Action Plan on Defense Institution Building, taking into account the effective judicial supervision. Albania was also joined on the Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC) in 2005. OCC is a mechanism through which all units available for PfP operations can be evaluated and integrated with the powerful forces of NATO, to increase operational efficiency. Albania also participates in the work of the Senior Civil Emergency Planning Committee. Based on the Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Program, Albania has received grant awards for over 20 projects for environmental and scientific cooperation. These activities have aimed at supporting the reform efforts of Albania and interaction. These projects include cooperation in strengthening the promotion of coexistence and religious tolerance, studies to overcome the difficulties of securing networks, and establishing the computer emergency response team. During the process of MPA, the diplomacy work focused more on how NATO works, rights and benefits that membership brings. Groups and public opinion leaders were regularly invited to visit NATO headquarters and Supreme Headquarters of Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE). Albania has had conferences and seminars. The conference held in 2007 with the title „NATO Week“ was very helpful to the public.

Conclusion

After the fall of Communism, and many political problems that Albania had, the main goal of Albania in my opinion was the Integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions. The road of Albania toward NATO in comparing with countries which started Democratic transitions after the fall of Communism was much difficult. After 1990's Albania faced not only political obstacles during the transition to Democracy but also economic obstacles which led to the interwar in 1997. "Luck of experience" of political leaders in Albania was another issue which slowed down the integration of Albania in two Euro-Atlantic institutions. After 1997 government of Albania speed up the reforms which had to meet in order to achieve the accession into NATO. Reforms taken toward this issue effected Albania not only to have stable politics, but also economy. Accession of Albania in NATO in 2009 had good impact on the road of Albania toward European Union. Close cooperation between Albania and NATO will continue in the future as well, because always have been noticed that good relations with Euro-Atlantic institutions have been significant benefits for Albania.



Albania in NATO

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⁷ Institute for Democracy and Mediation. Albanian perceptions on NATO integration. Tirana June 2007 <http://idmalbania.org/publications/en/AlbPerceptionOnNATOintegrations.pdf>